

DOES JANE AUSTEN MATTER?: FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES TO LITERATURE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine foreign language students' perspectives to literature teaching in the context of higher education. The research, conducted in a Romanian University, drew inspiration from decentred qualitative methodology (Holliday, 2011). Based on a distinction made by linguists between that which is explicitly said and that which is left implicit, the study provides an account of some characteristics of literary language, e.g. recovery of inferences based on the literary and historical context. The analysis of data was informed by transcribed audio recordings of semi-structured interviews. The findings show that students perceived literature teaching as beneficial, enhancing their pleasure of the text and their understanding of cultural and historical contexts and co-texts. They identified the following characteristics of literary texts as beneficial to their learning: the enrichment of lexis and the historical/literary context, the identification with characters leading to the use of collocations and creative writing.

Keywords: literature teaching, inferences, lexical enrichment, historical/literary context, identification, creative writing

INTRODUCTION: LITERATURE TEACHING AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Although the pedagogical environments in which foreign languages are taught are characterised by diverse practices (see Bloemert et al. 2017; Duncan & Paran 2018; Paran, Spöttl, Ratheiser & Eberharther 2021; Tsang et al.'s 2023), two distinct groups, the pro and anti-literature practitioners, still emerge as embattled (see below). In this article, I argue for a way of thinking about

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literature teaching as a fundamental aspect of learning a foreign language. I identify specific characteristics of literary texts (Widdowson 1983; Wolf 1999), illustrating them with a discussion of an example from Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*. Specifically, my study aims to find out about foreign language students' perspectives to literature teaching and to document those aspects of literary texts which they have identified as particularly important to their learning of English. I propose that this is a useful focus of attention for both learners and teachers, providing a linguistic basis to decisions about whether to include literature in the foreign language curriculum.

BACKGROUND: LANGUAGE TEACHING PEDAGOGY AND ASPECTS OF LITERARY TEXTS

Despite signs that literature teaching may be regaining some of its popularity, professional 'rifts' (Byrnes & Kord 2002, 36), 'disparity and conflict' (Fonder-Solano & Burnett 2004, 462) between those who advocate literature teaching and its detractors still occur. Nor is it of any comfort that the 'Cambridge First Certificate in English' and the 'Cambridge Proficiency' no longer include a literature section in their examination of foreign language learners.

This causes me to think that 'one half of the world cannot understand the pleasures of the other' (Jane Austen, *Emma*, chapter 9). A representative of that other half of the world is Edmondson (1997) who argues that literary texts do not have 'a specific function' in the business of language learning (Edmondson 1997, 53). This is not an isolated view. More recently, in the context of *English as a Lingua Franca* (ELF), it was claimed (House 2018, 135), that the English spoken by individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds does not have to be used for 'emotional identification'. This stance is opposed by many (Bloemert et al. 2017; Carter 2007; Paran 2008; Widdowson 1981) who argue that it is utilitarian (Paran 2008) and ignores claims that literature develops 'a sensitivity to the nuances of verbal expression' (Carter 2007, 10). In response to Edmondson's (1997, 44) observation that we need to be clearer about 'which role or roles foreign-language literature can or should play', the comprehensive model approach (Bloemert et al. 2017) seeks to clarify the 'roles' of literature teaching by dividing the study of literature into four approaches: 1) the 'text' approach focuses on literary terminology, 2) the 'context' approach on historical/biographical background, 3) the 'reader' approach on the reader's experience, and 4) the language approach on the use of literary texts to enhance language skills. Such a model may seem a helpful guide to teachers concerning the specific roles of literature teaching, although it soon becomes apparent that neatly outlined discrete categories have a tendency to overlap, i.e. learning about the historical background of a Jane Austen novel (context approach, 2) enhances our understanding of how lexical items were used in Georgian England (language approach, 4) and enhances the reader's experience (reader approach, 3). What Bloemert et al.'s (2017) study does not do is to capture how

the approaches to literature teaching interact and how this may affect students' perspectives to them. This is what the current study attempts to do here.

More specifically, it has been observed that students' attitudes to the teaching of literature are still relatively under-researched (Bloemert et al. 2017; Paran 2008). An early study in this area (Martin & Laurie 1993) relates students' interest in learning French literature to linguistic interests. Liaw's (2001) findings, however, suggest the opposite, namely that her Taiwanese students identify deeply with the story-world of five American stories. Paran (2008) expresses caution about such studies observing that students had voluntarily selected courses which included literature as part of their degree programme and that secondary schools are 'the locus of most language learning in the world' (Paran 2008, 490). While this may be the case, it is also likely that many pupils at secondary school level study foreign languages for utilitarian and instrumental reasons. Tsang et al.'s (2023) study of 1190 secondary school students, for example, finds that the benefits of poetry are rated lower than those of short stories, the reason given being that learners at that level may not be 'aware of the implicitness of grammatical analyses' in the context of poetry. Likewise, in Bloemert et al.'s (2017, 377) study of Dutch pupils' perspectives to literature education, 137 answers to the research question about the benefits of literature teaching are negative, e.g. 'listening to boring stories'. This seems to imply what others studies have suggested (Liaw 2001; Kern and Shultz 2005; Shanahan 1997), namely that the awareness of the cultural, historical and aesthetic benefits of reading foreign language literature develops later in higher education when students specialise in their chosen subject.

Studies in favour of literature teaching then seem to concur that learners engage with literary texts 'cognitively and affectively' (Lima 2013, 1) though they tend to overlook the specific characteristics of literary language. In particular, the category of 'language' is often separated from that of culture and history in a way which does not fully account for the mechanisms by which literary language encodes them.

It may help at this stage to consider certain aspects of literary language by looking at an example from Jane Austen's novel *Sense and Sensibility*. One of the characters, Edward Ferrars, is described by Elinor, his future wife, in this way:

1. "Of his sense and goodness" [...] "no one can, I think, be in doubt" (Austen 1811/2006, 23).

When readers are confronted with such an utterance, they are expected to derive from it a wide array of inferences. Readers who have acquired the contextual and historical knowledge of how 'sense' is used in Jane Austen's novels may derive the inferences that Edward represents the ideal of the neo-Georgian clergyman involved in useful pursuits which benefit his parishioners and his community's earthly salvation (see Giffin (2002) for a Georgian theological and soteriological understanding of 'sense' and C.S. Lewis (1960) for an in-depth account of how the word 'sense' has evolved historically).

In contrast with literary language, information-bearing texts, though they may themselves contain inferences, tend, on the whole, to be more explicitly written as in the doctor's prescription in example (2) below:

2. Take two tablets a day after mealtime.
Here, it is important that patients not only attend to what is being said explicitly, but also that they may be guided towards a specific interpretation. Attending to a wide array of inferences may be life-threatening. This distinction, then, made by linguists (Blakemore 1992; Sperber and Wilson 1986; Wolf, 1999) between that which is explicitly said and that which is left implicit, i.e. not said, is particularly relevant to foreign language learners for whom, in the example we have just analysed, the cultural, historical and theological inferences related to the word 'sense' are not readily accessible. Indeed, in an earlier study I conducted (Wolf, 2011) of French translations of Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, I found that the inferences concerning Edward as a clergyman differed from those in Jane Austen's novel. Whilst Jane Austen conveys the harmonious Anglican combination of pastoral usefulness and goodness in Edward's character, the translation of *Sense and Sensibility* by Privat (1979) highlights the intellectual nature of Edward's character:

3. 'Pour **son intelligence** [sense] et ses principes [goodness] [...] il est impossible de les mettre en doute' (Austen 1811/1979, 23, translated by Privat).
One way to account for this shift of focus to Edward's intellectual abilities rather than his usefulness is a lack of understanding on the translator's part of the cultural and historical inferences related to the word 'sense'. This, combined with a general lack of familiarity with Anglicanism, and we end up with a misleading translation that is more in line with a Cartesian definition of *le bon sens ou la raison* (see the beginning of Descartes' *Discourse on Method*).

It would appear that the frames of reference in literary language are not quite so readily accessible to the reader, and especially not so to foreign language learners. It may seem that this possibly impenetrable reality repels rather than engages learners. The evidence is, however, as Widdowson (1983, 32) observes, that writers as quintessentially English as Jane Austen, 'have relevance for people living in a totally different society.' When faced with a new historical reality, learners undoubtedly experience an increase in their processing efforts, but such efforts would be not be worthwhile if they were not rewarded by their language resources being consolidated as having a 'meaning potential' (Widdowson 1983, 32, Wolf 1999). Learners who access a wide range of cultural and historical inferences are given opportunities to find meaning potential in the rich tapestry of experiences embodied by the characters of classical literary texts.

METHODOLOGY

The design of the study drew on Holliday's (2010) understanding of research as 'decentred' from the researcher. By focusing on the researched individual's experiences of literature teaching, realities were allowed 'to emerge on their own terms' (Holliday 2010,11 citing Bhabha 1994). The semi-structured interviews were investigative in character, that is, they sought to elicit information about the research questions formulated in this article (see below) concerning students' general perspectives to literature teaching. The interviewer was not involved in teaching the interviewees so that the possibility of them adapting their contributions based on what they thought the interviewer expected from them was considerably lessened (Seidman 2006, 92). Furthermore, students were sent a transcript by email shortly after the interview and were invited to check its content for faithfulness and to send feedback if reflections on the interview occurred to them. This was voluntary and one of the participants declined the offer to edit what he had already said. The other students added information to the interview transcripts or clarified points they thought were unclear. The edited transcripts were used for analysis. Two students also provided examples of their creative writings, one of which has been included in Appendix 2 for illustrative purposes. The idea for the edited transcripts approach originated in a co-authored monograph (Robinson-Pant & Wolf, 2017), the data of which included doctoral students' reflective pieces about their personal experiences of research. The use of edited interview data is best suited to collect students' perspectives on literature teaching in an FL context in so far as it maximises the opportunities for participants to 'speak back' to me subjectively as language learners (Kvale, 1996). As the aim of the adopted approach was to avoid imposing a pre-determined interpretation on the data, I have attempted to capture the students' subjective perspectives to literature teaching without pre-defining their contributions in discrete codes in advance of data collection. This allowed for the emergent qualities of their contributions to inform my research findings (Holliday 2010).

RESEARCH AIMS

This study aims to contribute knowledge about the students' perspectives to literature teaching and how literary language may enhance their learning. These aims have led to the formulation of two research questions:

1. What are university students' perspectives to learning English through literary texts as part of their English language degree course?
2. What specific characteristics of literary language do university students identify as particularly important in their learning of English?

PARTICIPANTS' SELECTION CRITERIA, PROFILES AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The approval of the Ethics Research Committee of the Romanian University in which the research was conducted was obtained prior to data collection. Informed written consent to take part in the research was obtained from the participants who were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time, should they choose to do so. Nine students, studying or having studied English literature as part of their B.A. degree course in English as a foreign language, agreed to take part in the study (Appendix 1 provides a profile of their academic background). All participants had encountered literature teaching as part of their B.A. degree course although as far as the M.A. students were concerned, their contributions were based on recent recollections of their studies as undergraduates at the same university. It was felt that these should be included as enduring perspectives on literature teaching, and how they contribute to further study in a cognate field, i.e. M.A. in Intercultural Communication.

PARTICIPANTS' PERSPECTIVES TO LITERATURE TEACHING: KEY FINDINGS

Within the first research question concerning the students' perspectives to literature teaching, three main themes emerged which I shall discuss in relation to the participants' contributions below:

- the pleasure of the text
- the cultural/historical context, the literary context and the co-text
- the after-life of literary works

THE PLEASURE OF THE TEXT

This notion, which I borrow from Barthes (1973), is rarely addressed by those writing on literature teaching, possibly because there can be no general law of pleasure when confronted with a text which some will love and others dislike. Yet, it is a notion which all of the participants in this study alluded to when asked what their general experience of literature teaching was:

'I love English literature and I love being taught English literature and this is one of the reasons why I chose to study in English.' (P3)

'I was really excited because I read English literature before, but just for myself. So now I had the chance to really dig into the literature and have professors guiding me and telling me what this means [...] what the author

was trying to say. Because I didn't know what to expect exactly and still my expectations were fulfilled.' (P7)

This idea that literary texts confer a kind of cultural euphoria on the reader is confirmed by Barthes in an interview on the pleasure of the text (Roland Barthes "Le Plaisir du texte" | INA) and it is now to this concept of culture we must turn since it figures highly in the participants' discourse as a main reason for wanting to study literature.

THE CULTURAL/HISTORICAL CONTEXT, THE LITERARY CONTEXT AND THE CO-TEXT

The pleasure of the text referred to by Barthes is a kind of pleasure which is more valuable than others (see J.S. Mill's (2003, 188) second chapter of *Utilitarianism*) and relates to the literary and historical context. These higher forms of pleasure are evident in the students' literary engagement. Amelia and Bianca, for example, perceived how important a sense of the historical context was to their understanding of literature,

'I think it's, it's a great way to see into the social structure of the past and how it affected relationships because in Emma for example, you couldn't actually marry above or below your social status. It wasn't really done. Obviously that's not the case any longer.' (P3)

'Well, now we are studying the Victorian age and also the last book I have read was 'Emma' by Jane Austen. We thought it was kind of funny to know how the society worked at that time, especially for women. It has changed a lot because Jane Austen was really focused on marriage and courtship. Well, nowadays things have more rights than backwards. It's really interesting.' (P4)

The historical context was construed by some as the literary context of their readings:

'Mostly, I enjoy novels. I'm not a huge fan of poetry, so mostly I'm into the Victorian era and the realism in general. I quite enjoy the realism. They had quite a quite a different approach to things. Well, the historical background was different and it's very, very interesting how the authors captured all of the movements and everything that happened with the sad parts and the more happy parts as well.' (P1)

There is strong evidence here that the role of foreign language literature learning does not need to be related to utilitarian training needs (Edmondson, 1997).

Rather, it is an aesthetic identification with cultures and their history that opens up vistas on different horizons, not necessarily related to one's own (see Widdowson, 1983).

The co-text, i.e. the context within literary works, was also interestingly mentioned. Izabella, for example, talked about how one can be led 'down the garden path' with unexpected outcomes,

'For instance, I was really fond of *The Great Gatsby*. We spent the whole semester in it, and it was such an eye opening experience to read the whole story and then find out at the end that it was not at all what you imagined while reading the story. I think that that was the moment I realized that oh, English literature is such a complex work of art. And it's so interesting how you can guide the reader down the garden path and then at the last moment make a turn.'

(P7)

This observation may seem anodyne. Yet, it perfectly captures the recovery of inferences in the literary co-text. In this example, Izabella explains how she was 'led down the garden path' and how she had to cancel previously held assumptions in the course of her reading in order to recover the correct inference. This disambiguation of inferences is central to learning a language because it makes the best use of all the communicative resources readers and speakers have available to them (see Robinson-Pant and Wolf 2017, 24 for a detailed account of the role context plays in the recovery of inferences).

THE AFTER-LIFE OF LITERARY WORKS

A theme of particular interest relates to how classical works of literature have an after-life of relevance to students' present experiences. Amalia, who has been to the UK, interestingly reflected on the connections between the historical literary context and how she identified with contemporary cultural artifacts:

'Actually being in the UK and being there with my boyfriend, when I read English literature kind of transports me back and also because the buildings are still quite the same it I feel like I'm there and it actually does transport me back in history. That's what I love about English culture and how everything is kept the way it is. There are obviously modern buildings here and there, but they also keep the old ones and it's beautiful. He kept telling me about the house. Hundreds of years they have been there for hundreds of years, and I'm thinking my house hasn't been there for hundreds of years.'

(P2)

Cairn also subtly and articulately explored the contrast between the enduring architectural, specialized and technical contexts in novels and the temporal, ephemeral flesh and blood characters:

'In literary texts you can find things that can go toward a specialized field. Victor Hugo's 'Notre Dame de Paris', that story is more about the building, the architecture itself, how it endures through time, and how architecture itself can tell a story. So through that book I learned what a lot of things are when talking about Gothic art, like you know what a flying buttress is. Victor Hugo wanted to tell the story of how such a beautiful creation of man can resist the test of time. All the lives of the people in the book are temporary, but the structure, the thing that is there and is there to this day is the thing that is important and remains. And that's very interesting. He made a thing that is specialized. It's so cool how literature and the author's intent can make the reader care about anything they decide to focus on.'

(P5)

Cairn's concluding remark that we cherish the places where great works of art have been set points to the historical permanence of literature. Likewise, Olivia and Amalia remarked on this dimension of literature teaching as it relates to film re-tellings of the same stories, thus increasing their relevance:

'Even nowadays we still use literature in everyday life like even though we don't read the books, we have movies, songs about them. We have cartoons. What else, like manga that is a very trendy thing nowadays, everything is still based on literature as we know it, so even if we don't actually read it, it still impacts our lives. And those stories are still relevant nowadays [...] Hamlet's character, for example, it is still something that we can relate to because they're still human feelings. They are still something that we do.'

(P9)

I mean, it didn't matter to me that it depicted something from in the past because I thought it was very beautiful. I wasn't very aware of the historical context, but I knew some things from movies and stuff and it was very a very nice experience.

(P2)

An encounter with literature and its after-life in films and cultural artifacts thus creates expectations in students who, though they may not have visited the places where their favourite novels were set, are nonetheless enabled to migrate to them intellectually. Through literature they create what Steiner (1992, 499) referring to the act of translation calls 'alterities of being', that is, they render the inevitability of death less 'suffocating' (Steiner, 1992, 499) than it would otherwise be.

The second research question was concerned with how students identified specific characteristics of literary language as particularly important in their learning of English. Students identified the following characteristics of literary texts as particularly beneficial to their learning,

- Lexical enrichment and affective meaning
- Identification with literary characters
- Creative writing

LEXICAL ENRICHMENT AND AFFECTIVE MEANING

All of the participants involved in the study attributed a gain of confidence in learning to the enrichment of lexis. When asked how they perceived such an improvement, they identified particular characteristics of literary vocabulary. Bianca emphasised the affective meaning of words while Amelia recalled her initial lack of understanding:

‘Maybe because we have more time to think words through, and what it really means to us, and we can put a different meaning to our feelings. Maybe we haven’t thought about it, never before.’ (P4)

‘There were parts I didn’t understand due to how flowery the language was, but I kept on with the dictionary and it made sense in the end.’ (P3)

The lexis encountered in literary texts necessitates checking for meaning, learning and checking for appropriacy of use, a concern expressed by Luna:

‘Yeah, so when I read books, any book, I make a note on my phone where I write words that I’m, maybe I’ve heard of them, but I’m not sure of their meaning [...] then I look for the meaning online and I sort of try to remember those words and incorporate them in my, well not daily conversations, but you know, whenever I can, whenever it’s possible I try to do that. So I, and I learn so many new words, I don’t really, some of them I can’t use because they are very specific.’ (P8)

As I observed earlier, literary lexis is perceived by participants as involving some kind of inferential disambiguation based on context, not necessarily encountered in information-bearing language. Interestingly, literary vocabulary is contrasted with factual discourse by those who have had the experience of learning English through efferent texts. Iulia and Amalia, for example, are acutely aware of the specific characteristics of literary discourse especially when it comes to translating it:

‘I would point out that the possibility of feeling more liberated is greater when translating literature than when translating technical texts, for example, because, as I mentioned, literature is full of metaphors, cultural elements, artistic images, but here, all the meanings of the words in the

literary text play a very important role in the way we see the bigger picture. Whereas, if we are dealing with a technical text, it is important to know the terms used, very well, but it is not necessary to focus on their connotative meaning.' (P6)

'The way people express themselves in, let's say, newspapers is not the same. In Literature you get a completely different vocabulary, so I feel like you get a lot more options. A lot more ways of expressing yourself after you read books. A lot of different authors, because you also have different styles, so you some of you may develop a way of describing, or you may develop or social skills from it.' (P2)

Both comments echo the notion we encountered earlier that information-bearing texts use vocabulary in contexts that constrain readers to specific interpretations whereas literary discourse expands the encyclopaedic and historical knowledge, connotative and affective meaning needed to recover inferences in the constructed reality of the literary context. The participants also indicate a resulting sense of confidence in the way they develop a way of seeing the world, describing it, thus developing 'social skills'.

IDENTIFICATION WITH LITERARY CHARACTERS

Students consistently selected identification with literary characters' voice and behaviour as an aspect of literary texts which was particularly conducive to their learning:

'And it's not only the way they speak and the way they conduct conversations, but it's their behaviour. I sometimes see them as a role model, so I try to be like them as much as possible. And yeah, that goes with the way they speak as well. I try to incorporate that in my way of speaking.' (P8)

'And it helped me express myself better because then I can relate to someone and know that what I'm feeling is valid and there are people that feel that way, so I can express myself better.' (P7)

The voices of the characters with whom they strongly identify 'validate' the participants' feelings. When asked how they related to characters in their speech, participants could be quite specific. Izabella, for example, reported recycling collocations which characters had used themselves:

'And I even use not necessarily just terms, but also collocations or expressions that I read in the book because they stuck with me and I'm,

I feel like it defines me at one point, even, even if maybe not everybody knows where, where that expression is from, but for me it's just, it resonates with myself.' (P7)

She also amusingly used the voice of a character in her own discourse by means of citation:

'My favourite book from her (Jane Austen) is 'Pride and Prejudice', and I could see myself as Elizabeth[...] She wanted to keep herself true to her nature of being independent and I really liked her character, but one expression that I use a lot from this book is when Mr. Darcy said 'you bewitched me, body and soul'. I was like, oh, that's perfect. I use it every time I want to talk about something I'm really passionate about or someone I really like [...] I use my expression all the time and certain people even if they, they may not know me that well, but they know that I use that phrase a lot. And even they started to know where it's from because I use it so often that they're like, ah! 'Bewitched body and soul' that's 'Pride and Prejudice'! (P7)

CREATIVE WRITING

Seven participants out of nine unexpectedly revealed that their improvement in their learning of English was related both to reading literature and to creative writing. Cairns, for example, goes in some detail as to how he developed his own style of writing:

'I call them mood writings. I just describe a scene, when it's pleasant, when you come home, I like to describe the details of what happens. So I think that's very nice and it's like the inside voice of you that you don't even hear. You do things like you put the coffee on and you drink it and that's it. The coffee is done. Here I am referring to how you feel when you think about certain actions that feel ordinary, yet when you really think about them, they seem like such lively and beautiful activities.' (P5)

Some like Adrian, Amelia, Olivia, Izabella, Iulia and Bianca had not had many opportunities to write creatively except in sporadic assignments, but all reported gaining in confidence through doing so:

'I write for work, but nothing big or comprehensive, like, I've, I've written a short story for an assignment last year. Yeah, [...] I didn't have much of a story to tell, so I'm still looking for models and I haven't found, so to speak, my favourite [...] I'm not even sure if I have a style outside of the American broadcast style of talking. I've thought about it. I would be a kind of, I think, a slow-burn, type of writer, the one that lets you wait for hundreds of pages before the intrigue.' (P1)

'It did help [...] I actually did get some prizes for something that I wrote last year and I was very shocked that somebody actually liked it, because for me it still sounds boring and not good enough, but obviously it improved my skills. It helped me think in English like most of the time I'm thinking in English, so it's easier to come with ideas and to write them directly in the language in English that I wanted to write easier this way than to translate.'

(P9)

'I have a book at home and I write short stories in the book but I don't want to sound narcissistic, but the main character is always myself and I put myself in different situations and for instance, let's say I read Stephen King one night and then the next day I have an encounter at the faculty that resembles a little bit with that. So I take a little bit of Stephen King and make it horror, but with my own experience.'

(P7)

Reading literature gives those participants models to imitate. They experiment with them creatively, adapting them to their own needs, mimicking the voices of the models. In most cases this enabled them to gain confidence in not only developing their cognitive ability to think in English, but also to develop their own style of writing.

DISCUSSION: THE PLEASURE OF LITERATURE LEARNING AND CREATIVITY

The explorative and qualitative approach adopted by this study has allowed for a complex reality to emerge. This has revealed the participants' perspectives to literature teaching to be both idiosyncratic and multifaceted. The data suggest that the overall responses of the participants to literature teaching are positive. They are expressed in terms of a pleasure in narrative and the historical context of literary works. These results are in line with those of other studies, Bloemert et al., 2019, 38, for example, which have shown that 'context' was the second most beneficial approach in surveyed students.

As far as the identification of aspects of literary texts is concerned, participants focus on lexical enrichment as of particular benefit to them. In contrast to House's (2018, 135) claim, the participants emphasise the affective meaning of lexis in line with other scholarly articulations of literature teaching (Kern and Shultz 2005; Lima, 2013; Shanahan, 1997). Participants report that literary lexis expands connotative, historical and inferential meaning and enables them to develop new perspectives on the world. This finding supports Liaw's (2001) study of participants who report lower levels of anxiety when encountering literary vocabulary as well as a gain in confidence and enjoyment in reading English texts. The current study also supports the survey findings of Davis et al. (1992), namely that FL students' positive attitudes toward literary

teaching are related to the opportunity they have to identify with characters. In the current study, this translates itself into the use of characters' language, e.g. collocations, citations and imitation.

There is no support here for Akyel and Yalcin's (1990) study in which EFL teachers claim that their students are unable to express their thoughts through writing in English. The majority of students in this study observe that their improvement in language learning is inextricably linked to creative writing. Students go into some detail as to how they develop their particular style of writing, how they gain in confidence through doing so, and how this enables them to develop their cognitive ability to think in English coherently. Two of them provide evidence of creative writing at a very high level of expertise (see sample in Appendix 2). This finding confirms Liaw's (2001) study in which she reports an improvement in writing and the organization of logical thought.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is hoped that this study provides a useful insight into the benefits and challenges related to the implementation of literature teaching in a foreign language context. The findings indicate that literature teaching is perceived by participants as an effective means of developing, amongst others, their historical knowledge of lexis and related inferential ability, their identification with literary characters' discourse and their motivation for creative writing.

The study has certain limitations. Although it provides valuable information about individual perspectives on literature teaching, the small sample size does not allow for conclusions to be generalized. A larger student cohort would have yielded further insights and it would be helpful, therefore, if the study were replicated with different participants. Nonetheless, though it is a localised study, it has enabled students to participate in academic inquiry that has provided them with opportunities to voice their shared experiences of literature teaching and to address the issues related to it within the context of creative writing. And so, to answer the question we started off with, Jane Austen matters.

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APPENDIX 1

P1. Adrian	B.A English Literature	Year 2
P2. Amalia	B.A. English Literature	Year 2
P3. Amelia	B.A. English Literature	Year 2
P4. Bianca	B.A. English Literature	Year 2
P5. Cairn	B.A. Translation Studies	M.A. Applied Linguistics
P6. Iulia	B.A Translation Studies	M.A. Applied Linguistics
P7. Izabella	B.A. English Literature	M.A Applied Linguistics
P8. Luna	B.A. English Literature	M.A. Applied Linguistics
P9. Olivia	B.A. English Literature	Year 2

APPENDIX 2

Example of creative writing

(Blake's influence, The Prince of Love)

When the stars come out to play
and it's getting cold,
the stairs to heaven call my name
and there's no return.

Try to fight it,
soon you'll see,
he grabs my hand,
don't let me breathe.

*But he's an angel
and I'm his pray.*

His eyes are brown.
His smile is fake.

Wake up again,
don't let him know,
days will pass
until you grow.

Bianca